

This first issue of The Japan Society Review in 2017 covers a wide range of topics and media, from history to humour and origami, from academic books to popular films, aiming to bring you some of the latest Japan-related publications and events in the UK.

The monograph by Dr Gordon Daniels offers a comprehensive study of one particular episode of the Anglo-Japanese history, the Japanese Red Cross Mission to Britain during the First World War. As our reviewer Gill Goddard points out, the story of those Japanese nurses and doctors at the Red Cross Hospital at Netley highlights Japan's contribution to military nursing and medicine in the early decades of the 20th century as well as the nation's political position at the time.

The recent re-edition of *Womansword: What Japanese Words Say about Women* by Kittredge Cherry not only marks the 30th anniversary of its original publication, but also provides reviewer Charlotte Goff, and our readers, the opportunity of reflecting on how the Japanese language expresses womanhood. Focusing on the socio-historical role of laughter and foolery in Japan

and their connections with Japanese folklore, mythology and religion, *Holy Foolery in the Life of Japan*, reviewed by Sir Hugh Cortazzi, complicates the often baseless stereotype that the Japanese do not have a sense of humour. As its titles indicates, *Origami for Mindfulness* by Mari Ono, reviewed by Margaret Russo, presents the art craft of origami from a therapeutic perspective, offering step-by-step instructions to create beautiful paper figures as a useful way of releasing stress and concentrating the mind.

Finally, our last reviews of this issue are dedicated to two celebrated films recently released in the UK. The animated film *Your name* directed by Shinkai Makoto has been a great success within and beyond Japan and our reviewer Poppy Cosyns confirms the beauty of its animation and the appeal of its coming-of-age story. On a very different topic, Roger Macy reviews *Silence*, Martin Scorsese's adaptation of the homonymous novel by Shusaku Endo, which depicts the violent eradication of Christianity in the early Tokugawa period.

Alejandra Armendariz-Hernandez

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## Editor

Alejandra Armendariz-Hernandez

## Reviewers

Gill Goddard, Charlotte Goff, Sir Hugh Cortazzi, Margaret Russo, Poppy Cosyns and Roger Macy

(Photo: Kerry Brown)

## The Japanese Red Cross at Netley, 1915-1916

by Gordon Daniels

Hampshire Field Club &  
Archaeological Society (2016)

ISBN-13: 978-0-907473-16-9

Review by Gill Goddard



In this piece of detailed research, Dr Daniels has brought into focus the role of the Japanese Red Cross Relief Mission to Britain during the 1914-1918 war. For most of 1915, a team of highly qualified nurses and doctors brought their expertise in caring for battlefield casualties to the newly built Red Cross Hospital at Netley, near Southampton in Hampshire. The medical and nursing work of this early foreign medical assistance to Britain was much appreciated at the time as many British medical staff had already gone overseas to work at the frontline, while replacement volunteers often lacked the necessary training and expertise.

Using a variety of both Japanese and British resources, Dr Daniels examines the background to the sending of a detachment of Japanese Red Cross personnel half way round the world, and through examination of previously untranslated material has illuminated further the motivation of the Japanese government, and the detailed briefings given to the group in preparation for their departure. Newspaper coverage shows that on the journey to Britain via Hawaii

and across America the US Japanese community gave them a great reception, and that Hampshire society also was generous in its welcome to the party of 20 female nurses, two male doctors, an interpreter and an administrator.

Additionally, the story of the origins and formation of the Japanese Red Cross itself is covered in some detail, giving the reader an insight into the development of military medical expertise in Japan and its ready availability to assist its allies in time of need. That all of the expense of the mission to Britain and the sister missions to Russia and to France was borne by Japan is rightly not overlooked.

As the British media continues its fascination with the 1914-1918 war, the timely publication of this interesting monograph focuses on Japan's contribution not on the battlefield but in the humanitarian field of military nursing and medicine. As Dr Daniels points out, this aspect of the Japanese government's interpretation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance gave their country honour and indeed face in a world still politically dominated by the Western powers. §

***The Japanese Red Cross at Netley* is available to Japan Society members for the discounted price of £8 including postage and packing (usually £10). Orders with cheques payable to "Hampshire Field Club" should be sent to Julia Sandison at 22 Clifton Road, Winchester SO22 5BP.**

## Womansword: What Japanese Words Say about Women

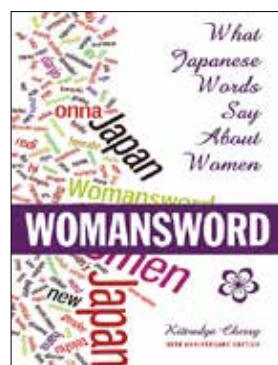
by Kittredge Cherry

Stone Bridge Press

30th Anniversary edition (2016)

ISBN-10: 161172029X

Review by Charlotte Goff



Three decades after its original publication, *Womansword: What Japanese Words Say about Women* remains a rare resource for Japanese learners and those who wish better to understand how the Japanese language expresses womanhood. Kittredge Cherry, who describes arriving in Narita in 1982, 'a young American woman eager to conquer Japanese language and Japanese sexism, not necessarily in that order', spent five years speaking to

Japanese women, collating and interpreting Japanese words and arranging them in categories such as female identity, motherhood and sexuality. The result was *Womansword*, a collection of definitions and short essays and above all a distillation of cross-cultural conversations about being a woman.

I had misgivings about the premise of a book in which a non-Japanese person claims to explain what Japanese words say about Japanese women, and by extension about my role as a non-Japanese reviewer of that book. Couldn't both roles be done better by a Japanese woman with the native Japanese required fully to understand the words' nuance and context, and the experience of being a woman in Japan, of using these words and having them used about her? Kittredge Cherry, it seems, had the same misgivings. In the preface to the original edition of her now classic published in 1987, she wrote that it was the enthusiasm of Japanese women themselves which pushed her

to publish despite her main reservation: 'Shouldn't Japanese women, like all people, be speaking for themselves?'

Cherry's reservations about speaking for Japanese women were assuaged, but the fact that she had them helped make what could easily have been a glib, outside perspective of Japanese exceptionalism (what might now fall under the 'weird Japan' sub-genre of Japan-related media) into something more meaningful. Rather than speaking for, or over, Japanese women, Cherry's work is the product of forging connections with and listening to Japanese women. It is easy to see why these women enjoyed speaking to Cherry, in some cases even helping her research both the original and its re-edition three decades later. Her sense of humour is clear, as is her kindness towards the language and culture she describes. She is careful, in most cases, not to import foreign value judgements in interpreting the Japanese words she presents, and the value of her work lies in its refusal to accept easy, dated stereotypes of Japanese women. The title itself is a welcome rejection of the popular western stereotype which sees Japanese women as submissive and weak: Cherry coined 'womansword' to denote both the strength of Japanese women, wielding swords since the seventeenth century and still now dominating *naginata* sword-play, as well as the words used about women.

The beauty of *Womansword* is that, whilst it focuses on Japanese language and women, it forces the English-speaking reader to remember the biases which exist in their own language, too. I was struck by the number of these Japanese words which have

equivalent English terms or concepts. For the Japanese word '*kizumono*' we might talk of 'damaged goods', and whilst Japanese women who don't marry before the age of twenty-five might once have been called 'Christmas cakes', in English we share the metaphor to a certain extent: women being 'left on the shelf' like unwanted food, a fate eschewed by men. In the same way, we might not talk about the 'daughters-in-a-box' that Cherry describes, but we do speak of 'trophy wives', similarly imagined as objects for presentation and preservation by men; although we don't usually label our mothers dinosaurs or '*mamagon*', we do have a word for the female fiancé when she crosses our threshold of acceptable female assertiveness: 'bridezilla'. The fact that Cherry was able to explain these terms in English is in itself testament that many of these concepts are shared, used in both languages.

Reading this latest re-edition of Cherry's classic, it is difficult not to feel frustrated that there is no guarantee that the collected words and concepts continue to be current in 2017. The new preface, which introduces contemporary Japanese 'woman's words' such as 'sci-girl' and 'womenomics', as well as describing the social and linguistic changes which have taken place between publication of the original and its thirtieth edition, has the almost inevitable corollary of highlighting how outdated some of the original words and concepts are, decades later. Cherry provided readers with a snapshot of how Japanese language reflects attitudes towards womanhood, but it is important to remember that some Japanese women at the time and Japanese women in the future are excluded from this frame. §

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## Holy Foolery in the Life of Japan

by Higuchi Kazunori

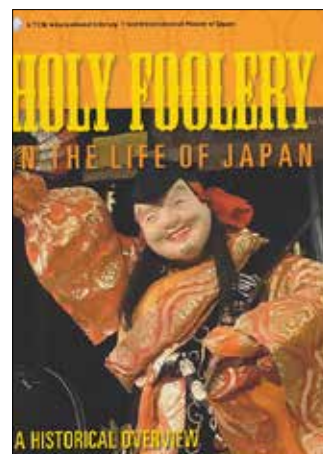
translated by Waku Miller

LTCB International Library Trust/International House of Japan (2015)

ISBN-13: 978-4-924971-40-0

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

'Before the modern era, people in Japan and in other nations tolerated and even welcomed foolery in their heroes. Modernization, at least in Japan, ushered in a preoccupation in schools and in the workplace with seriousness and diligence. Japanese society lost its tolerance for silliness. People came to regard foolery as socially useless, as mere frivolity'. So declares the



author of this thought-provoking analysis of the role of laughter in Japan.

Foreigners who only meet a few officials and business executives, in whom the importance of serious (*majime*) attitudes has been inculcated in school and university, foster the idea that the Japanese have no sense of humour.

This impression is reinforced by the lack of a simple Japanese term for sense of humour other than '*umoru no sensu*'. (Once when years ago I was giving a speech in Sapporo and referring in Japanese to this problem

one old gentleman misheard me and asked what I meant by 'umoru no senso', senso meaning war!).

In fact as Higuchi points out laughter and fun have played a significant role in Japanese mythology and folklore since the earliest times. The kanji for laughter, 笑い (*warai*), apparently 'evolved from an ideographic representation of a shrine maiden extending her arms upward while dancing'. He notes that the sun goddess Amaterasu-omikami who had hidden herself in a cave because of havoc caused by her brother Susa-no-o was only enticed to emerge when Ame-no-uzume caused peals of laughter by dancing wildly tearing off her clothes and exposing her breasts 'and even her genitalia'.

Foolery and laughter, as Higuchi points out, have been important elements in Shinto mythology ever since. He quotes many examples from Japanese folklore drawing on the writings of scholars such as Yanagita Kunio and the eccentric Minakata Kumagusu, who was the subject of a biographical portrait by Carmen Blacker (*Britain and Japan; Biographical Portraits*, volume I, ed. Ian Nish, Japan Library, 1994).

In Japan as in Europe 'great' men needed to be kept amused and had their 'fools' or jesters. One of the most famous of these was Sorori Shinzaemon who served the 'ruthless warlord' Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598). Hideyoshi had an 'inferiority complex about his appearance' and confessed to Shinzaemon that he thought he looked like a monkey. Shinzaemon responded 'No. Sire. So in awe of your greatness are the monkeys that they distort their faces to look like your Highness's'. Shinzaemon escaped punishment.

Japanese serious and stately noh dramas were lightened by short comic playlets or *kyōgen*. These often depicted 'scams and hoaxes' and servants getting their own back on their masters. In Japan as in other cultures laughter is often roused by lampooning the pompous and the overbearing.

Unfortunately humour of this kind can also be cruel. It is easy to make a fool of the 'village idiot' who may have been born mentally deficient or crippled. But laughter can also, as Higuchi points out, play a role in lightening the horrific effects of natural disasters, to which Japan is sadly so prone. Laughter can be seen in such circumstances 'as an expression of relief and as a sign of safety'.

Higuchi's book is not and does not claim to be a history of Japanese humour. He does include Hokusai and his manga, but it does not cover *senryū* (haiku-length witty verses) or comic novels of the Edo period. Nor does it discuss modern comic manga and strip cartoons. And there is nothing about modern writers of comic stories such as Genji Keita whose 'salaryman' stories I used to translate. But a book covering all these aspects of Japanese humour would be a hefty tome.

I feared when I began reading Higuchi's book that he might put too much effort into analysing the psychology of laughter and defining the meaning of humour in ways that deaden any sense of fun. But while there were interesting lessons in folklore, religion and history in his book I realised that he did not want his readers to approach his subject in too *majime* a way. Many of his examples are amusing as well as informative. §

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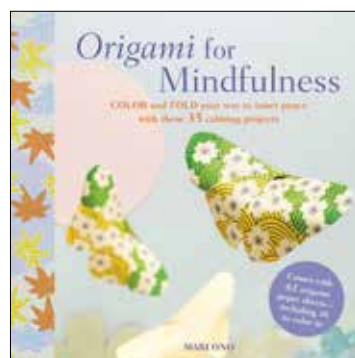
## Origami for Mindfulness

by Mari Ono

CICO Books (2016)

ISBN-13: 9781782494058

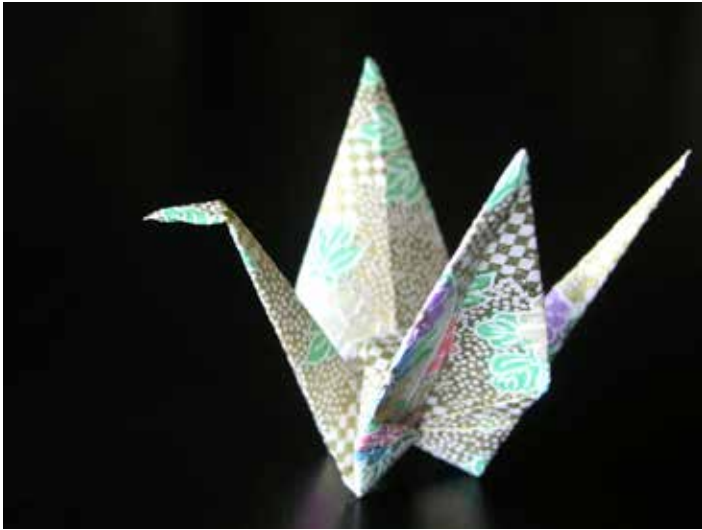
Review by Margaret Russo



I don't believe that anyone could disagree with the statement that we live busy lives today which can be often stressful. We pack in activities and schedule ourselves to the point that spontaneity or the sheer pleasure of 'doing nothing' is a lost art. Technology, meant to make our lives easier, has had the opposite effect. We rely on our phones and tablets for entertainment, information, and yes, once in a while,

communication. We are bombarded with information 24/7. We have not evolved as a species to cope with life as it is today. Consequently, apart from stress, we are in turn, angry and tired, and this has led to an unprecedented increase in anxiety and depression across all age groups. So how do we bring ourselves back into balance?

Mindfulness has come into popular culture in recent years but it is a concept which is centuries old. Being mindful is being present – completely present – in the given moment. When you are mindful, you are focused and when you are focused, your mind cannot wander into the past or the future where you have no control. I practice mindfulness, but being human with flaws and frailties, I falter at times. I was therefore delighted to come across Mari Ono's *Origami for Mindfulness*.



### 'Colour and fold your way to inner peace'

Speaking as an admirer of all things Japanese, I found Mari's beautiful book a joy for the senses. It is visually exquisite and in opening it to the first pages, you know that you are in for a treat. She discusses the history behind origami and, uniquely, spells out why origami is therapeutic. It releases stress, it relaxes. It requires focus, and Mari goes so far as to suggest it can even have an anti-ageing effect! What origami certainly does is feed our creative juices and with that, brings us joy.

The book comes with origami papers, some of which are to be coloured in. Again, the very act of colouring is calming as it requires concentration. The popularity of adult colouring books on the market today speaks for itself. The book is divided into chapters entitled 'Love and Hope', 'Happiness and Laughter' (a particular favourite of mine) and 'Belief and Willingness'. Within each chapter you will find a variety of projects with a difficulty rating of one to three stars. The individual projects are well illustrated with step-by-step instructions. I confess to being a complete origami novice. I opened the book to its first chapter and found the Fusenbako Balloon Box with an 'easy' rating. After several minutes, I was left with a piece of paper with a million folds but no box. Determined, and keeping with the box theme, I next selected the Kobako Chocolate Box. Not easy, but a success! I have my lovely little Kobako (without chocolate) box next to me as I write, and I couldn't be more pleased.

Like so many things in life, origami is a craft to be practiced and perfected over a period of time. It requires complete focus and attention. The joy of creating something beautiful out of a piece of paper is immeasurable. Is this one antidote to our hectic lives? Yes it is. And I do feel calmer. S

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## Your Name

directed by Shinkai Makoto

Released 24 November 2016

Review by Poppy Cosyns

Since anime titan Miyazaki Hayao formally announced his retirement back in 2013, there has been a collective anxiety over who might prove a worthy successor. After his reluctant heir Miyazaki Goro failed to make much of an impact with 2011's gentle *From Up On Poppy Hill*, anime fans have started to look beyond the aegis of Studio Ghibli to find one. And so enter Shinkai Makoto. He began his career as a graphic designer, before realising his dream of writing and directing animations in the early '00s. His fifth feature, *Your Name* is now Japan's third highest grossing domestic film of all time, sandwiched between Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Princess Mononoke*.

It tells the story of teenagers Mitsuha and Taki, who have the humdrum of their daily lives disrupted when they mysteriously start swapping bodies. First



we see Tokyoite Taki go through the disorientating experience of living a day in the body of a stranger – waking up astonished to find that he has breasts (a recurring joke in the film) before shambling through Mitsuha's school day in the rural, conservative town of Itomori. Mitsuha then, is equally overwhelmed when forced to negotiate Taki's macho schoolmates and chaotic part-time job as a waiter. The pair swap back and forth at random and once returned to their original

bodies leave each other instructional text messages as a means of damage limitation.

The first half of the film perfectly captures the giddiness and absurdity of adolescence, Shinkai using the body-swapping plot device to explore the transformation and lack of control that define that awkward stage between childhood and adulthood. In the second half, the tone darkens as Itomori (a fictional town loosely based on Shinkai's birthplace) is threatened by natural disaster, leading Taki to embark on a time-hopping adventure to save the town – and, moreover, the girl – to whom his life is now irrevocably

tied. Aside from its fast-paced plot and sensitive portrayal of the teenage psyche, the film also excels visually, its epic vistas bringing to mind the fantastical landscapes of English romantic painter John Martin. Whether depicting the verdant fields and star-filled skies of Itomori or the power-line strewn labyrinths of residential Tokyo, each scene has been beautifully executed. Like Miyazaki, Shinkai possesses an attention to detail that can elevate a piece of work to greatness and there is little in this film's content or presentation that hasn't been finished with meticulous care. §

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## Silence

directed by Martin Scorsese

Released 1 January 2017

Review by Roger Macy

The missionary, Martin Scorsese, is an apostate. He had promised us, in a votive epilogue to the recent academic volume *Approaching Silence* (Mark Darren and Darren J. N. Middleton eds., 2015), to let us understand what cannot be shown. He even invoked the Eisenstein principle of montage and 'third meaning' as a tool of God to be employed to understand His meaning (Scorsese's punctuation, not mine). However, what we finally got after two-and-a-half hours – and, be warned, we head straight to the spoiler, here – was something mundanely shown, without montage, in our plain view; that thing destroyed without possibility of transmission, which had lain hidden from all but his closest family whilst he spent his career as an effective persecutor of the tangible and intangible assets of the church in Japan. Scorsese is hardly an untalented filmmaker, and this little thing had, I grant, been seen to be hidden in an earlier episode, subtly, in an unsubtle place – much closer to where Allied P.O.W.s hid something precious. But it's unlikely that Scorsese was thinking of that. Let me paint a broader context.

Scorsese has adapted the famous novel of Endo Shusaku. The novel is set mainly around the 1630s at a time when the violent eradication of Christianity in the early Tokugawa era was mainly achieved, apart from isolated villages in the far west. Two firebrand Jesuit priests are landed clandestinely to make contact with any remaining faithful and discover the truth of the rumoured apostasy of their own mentor. By doing so, they bring the remaining flocks into mortal danger



and diabolical temptation to betray, and not just by thirty pieces of silver.

The first half of the book comprises letters back of one of these priests, Rodrigues, to his mission headquarters in Macao. Most of the second half, after the priest's capture, takes the form of a narrative of the torture of the faithful. This novelised, supra-human narrative, nevertheless, reports the arguments within the mind of Rodrigues in a much more internalised, naked, form than his reports to head office had previously revealed. Spoiler alert, again – he does apostatize and, after that, there is a short section of supposed reports of surveillance of his house arrest from his spy-masters to their head office in the bakufu.

If, reader, you think I've given much away, I can reasonably deduce that you are not a reader of the novel, nor of any of the academic essays on the nature of that apostasy, the most recent collection I mentioned at the beginning. The contested meaning of this apostasy lays bare the considerable difficulty in portraying the book on film.

Scorsese's is not the first adaptation of Endo's novel. Less than five years after its first publication, the director Shinoda Masahiro made his version in 1971, which is available in an English-subtitled

DVD. Mark Williams, the author of the English-language monograph on Endo, *Endo Shusaku: A Literature of Reconciliation* (1999), writes of Endo's "well-documented disappointment" at the only film version in his lifetime, in the way it depicts Rodrigues' "abandonment of a silent God". Williams is an assiduous scholar but there is a conspicuous absence of any reference to support "well-documented". That disappointment is, indeed, universally attested, but Endo would have had a problem documenting his objection since he is not only credited with the original story but also its adaptation. It's not hard to see what he disliked. Shinoda's film has Rodrigues making, finally the required gesture of renunciation – the stepping upon the image of Christ, the *fumie*. All that happens afterwards in that film is that Rodrigues is assigned a young widow to marry, and Shinoda closes with Rodrigues ravishing his acquired wife with gusto. That wife was played by Shinoda's wife, Iwashita Shima, and this scene just happens to generate the still that was used for the poster in Japan. So, in a painful double irony, Endo found himself credited with a total repudiation that he then spent a lifetime attempting to reverse.

The appeal of Endo's novel to the left in Japan had much to do with the parallels that could be easily taken with the phenomenon of *tenko* - the required renunciation of views that was required of dissenters by the militarist authorities during the 'dark valley' of totalitarian rule up to 1945. It's not difficult to discern this as the appeal of the story to the leftist Shinoda, but whether he appreciated the irony of inducing a career of reverse-*tenko* for the original author, I cannot say.

Endo's quest to re-narrate the perceived ending of *Silence* can even be seen in his rare appearance on British television. Should readers not immediately recall Endo's ownership of the *Bookmark* programme on BBC2 on 13 April 1988, it is now easily viewable in the British Library Reading Rooms. After Endo speaks to camera on various topics, he chooses to read from this very novel, and specifically from the internal dialogue of the narration leading up to Rodrigues' apostasy. This characterises his *tenko* as an act of love for the Japanese who are being persecuted for his faith; and an act of humility in accepting that it is not for him to re-enact Christ's own sacrifice, the defining act of the Trinitarian church. Rodrigues, in his narrated mind, steers himself into a lesser sacramentalism and love of God through his own imaging of the face and voice of Jesus. My problem with Endo's supposed correction of the record is that his reading omits the remarks in the

novel immediately before and after this section – which see this view as a self-serving justification. These doubts about the doubts originate from his grand inquisitor Inoue, who had every reason to want Rodrigues to hold to this renunciation. It seems to me that the original novel explored doubt more fundamentally than Endo seems to have later maintained, and much more than Scorsese wishes to depict. Neither of these men had, or has, any 'Chinese wall' from their authority on Earth, the One catholic and apostolic church. Soon after the original publication of the novel, the bishop of Nagasaki told his flock from the pulpit that they should not read this novel. Endo was eventually successful in getting the church to soften its position. Scorsese's attention was initially prompted by the Episcopalian archbishop of New York, but I firmly believe that Scorsese's project operates within the grace of the Roman Catholic church. This unbeliever also believes that Endo's confidence in Scorsese stemmed from a wish to repudiate his own doubt.

So, the apostasy of which I accuse Scorsese is cinematic and definitely not doctrinal or sacramental.



If Scorsese has steered Endo's novel into safer waters, he has certainly read the novel. For example, at the moment of Rodrigues' stamping on the *fumie*, Shinoda cuts to a momentarily disappointed Ferreira, his Jesuit predecessor in apostasy. For Scorsese, that disappointment is on the face of Inoue himself (whom the novel reveals to be an even earlier apostate).

Scorsese's coda depicts Rodrigues and Ferreira in a busy public life of persecuting the Faith, whilst one, at least, of them secretly holds to the faith. But that does not begin to convey Endo's coda. Endo's *atogaki*, or postscript, is in the form of a 'diary' by a secret policeman of the *bakufu*. This has Rodrigues, now with a Japanese name and family, under close house arrest and under pressure to produce further testimonies against the Faith. Mark Williams, in his essay in *Approaching Silence*, points out that this 'diary' is based on a real historical manuscript, the *Yoroku*, which Endo fundamentally altered to amplify Rodrigues further wavering and doubt. We get none of

this in either film version. The 'diary' makes some key references to another character in the novel, Kichijiro, a vacillating figure who makes more apostasies than most of his fellow-villagers had hot breakfasts. Endo clearly invokes the imagery of Judas in this character and both filmmakers pick up on this. But the 'diary' in the novel has Kichijiro re-entering the life of a closed Catholic family, in a way that I could imagine reading in a secret policeman's report from Elizabethan England. Who better to make doubt eternal than the figure of Kichijiro?

This brings me to a brief consideration of actors. A sizeable proportion of the preview audience saw Kichijiro's continual repentances as a comic turn and laughed considerably. They also laughed at the character of Inoue. This is nothing short of disastrous. The protagonist, Rodrigues, must, according to Endo's *syuzhet*, see Kichijiro's path as the wiser. Inoue, on the other hand, is an informed manipulator, highly empathetic in a thoroughly malign way. Both were depicted by Japanese actors of considerable fame, working outside their native tongue. The inquisitor in chief, Inoue, is played by Ogata Issei, whose comic style of acting is here taken even further than normal in an eccentrically accented English. To my mind, the two actors who acquit themselves well are Adam Driver and Tsukamoto Shinya but alas, both their characters have died humbly for their faith before the crux.

Casting problems lead us to the general problem of language. Endo's novel is, of course, in Japanese, apart from a handful of Latin phrases. The reader knows from the beginning that it starts as an account by a Portuguese priest to his superiors in Macao, but translation is rarely visible, it is merely implied or elided over with just a few references to a character becoming versed in Japanese. Later, in the novel-form narration of the interrogation, another character steps in as translator for Inoue.

As soon as this story is portrayed on screen, some problems will not go away. The missionary priests come from a racial otherness, which marks them as different from the faithful they serve as priests. Casting blind to racial difference would create a comprehension barrier to appreciating the historical setting, and few have attempted it. Shinoda and Scorsese, as you would expect, have Western actors play the priests and Japanese actors play all the other speaking parts. Shinoda's film was only pitched at a Japanese audience. His two 'foreign' actors playing the two priests are given a superficial credibility of foreignness by speaking some non-Japanese, but it's certainly

not Portuguese and it's not always recognisable as English. Alas, the UK DVD doesn't subtitle the Western dialogue which sometimes escaped me. It made it painfully obvious that the director of these actors did not understand the dialogue they were attempting. Given that experience, I tried hard to find a native Japanese-speaker to hear the Scorsese film with me, but this could not be, so I can only report as an English-speaker.

Scorsese's film has its own conventions about speaking 'foreign', which pretty much follow the Hollywood norm. The non-foreign that the three Hollywood stars speak is never Portuguese, but a neutral American-accented English. Perhaps an hour into the film, there is a reference in the dialogue to speaking, or not speaking Portuguese, but the story is written as a setting specifically of the English-translated, and hence English-spoken novel. In the usual novel narration, it is the understanding of the reader that is the 'home' language and the actual form of the language spoken can be left unsaid. But, in the film, with language difference being such a crucial element of the story, and of the original encounter, and with known Japanese actors, set in Japan, before my eyes, I found it hard to overlook language difference in the long passages where I was effectively asked to do so. In particular, Inoue, and his actor, Ogata Issei, should never have been allowed to speak English. I guess the Hollywood money wouldn't permit any other language but English for the showdown.

These criticisms perhaps do not give sufficient credit for how Scorsese has depicted the past as a foreign country. It would have been very easy to make 17th century Japan doubly alienated and Scorsese largely avoids unnecessary exoticism whilst convincingly portraying the landing on an unknown shore. He also controls the darkness better than Shinoda, whose filming of the clandestine movements of the villagers was more ambitious than his film stock could always depict. But one thing that particularly marked Shinoda's film as avant-garde was the music. Doug Cummings, in the Masters of Cinema DVD booklet, writes of "atonal sounds", but it's much more jarring than that. Two developed but completely different tuning systems from East and West play their competing scores, which never reconcile or resolve. Takemitsu Toru seemed to relish taking up a constant theme of Endo, who saw two opposed cultures which, in his opinion, could not be planted in the other's soil. In contrast with that, I confess to not noticing music in Scorsese's film, except over the end credits. §